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Our Lady of Ipswich: devotion, dissonance, and the agitation of memory at a forgotten pilgrimage site

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Abstract:

This article traces the social life of Our Lady of Ipswich, a statue taken to be destroyed during the English Reformation, and the possibility of pilgrimage in the context of dramatic urban change and loss of place memory. Arguing that iconoclasm is not an end-point, we see that the life of the image is not extinguished on the pyre, but is set into motion by conflict surrounding its significance, efficacy, and survival. Indeed, it is not simply the act of iconoclasm that animates the statue; rather, such agonistic animation is an ongoing process which involves both those who reject and those who are devoted to the image. My argument is that the potency of contemporary images of Our Lady of Ipswich relies on an active cultivation of dissonance: the consciousness of religious schism; the disjuncture between Ipswich's historic importance and the perceived failures of twentieth-century development; and the juxtaposition between devotional pilgrimage destination and disenchanting shopping space.

Our Lady of Ipswich: devotion, dissonance, and the agitation of memory at a forgotten pilgrimage site

Lady Lane

In the county of Suffolk in the East of England, down a narrow passage at the end of one of Ipswich's pedestrianised zones, stuck above head height on the brown brick wall of a former supermarket, is a bronze statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary cradling the infant Jesus on her knee.¹ The statue marks the location of a shrine to Our Lady of Grace, closed in 1538 when church reformers took the statue of Mary from there to London to be burned. The shrine subsequently fell into ruin, with the stonework recycled elsewhere, and aside from this statue mounted on the wall in 1990, no other trace of its existence remains – except for the name of the passageway itself, Lady Lane, which survives from the town layout of the middle ages.

The idea of the revived English pilgrimage site has some precedent; Walsingham, in the neighbouring county of Norfolk, is a well-known site with a constant flow of pilgrims since efforts to “revive” its medieval status as a mass pilgrimage destination in the late 19th and early 20th century, and has been subject to ethnographic study (Coleman 2000; Coleman and Elsner 2004). Yet Ipswich today is comparatively unknown as a destination for pilgrims, in spite of the hundreds of years up to the 16th century throughout which a constant flow of people came to the shrine of Our Lady of Grace, with widely-circulated accounts of miracles associated with the statue there. This relative anonymity provides a useful anthropological vantage point: what does it mean for the sacred geography of a town to be forgotten or remembered, what does it mean to go on pilgrimage to Ipswich in the 21st century, and in what way is it appropriate to speak of the ‘survival’ of Our Lady of Ipswich?

¹ While this paper draws on material from repeated field visits to Ipswich between May 2014 and March 2017, the core observations emerge from a sustained period of ethnographic fieldwork in September 2014.

Central to this paper is the social life of an image; the presence of Our Lady of Ipswich as a relational being. The very possibility of a statue's social life is a matter of anthropological interest, revisiting the classic question of the agency of images as developed by Gell (1992; 1998). As Whitehead (2013) has argued in the context of Catholic statues of Our Lady in Andalusia and the Glastonbury Goddess among contemporary pagans in England, the way that we act on and are acted upon by such devotional objects gives them the character of personhood. An important idea which Whitehead draws upon here is Jon Mitchell's claim that statues are "animated... they are performed with, generating presence" (Mitchell 2010: 266). Similarly, building on the concept of circulation apparent in the work of Appadurai (1986), Bautista (2012) draws our attention to the 'locomotion' of statues and other devotional objects: how they move from place to place (for example, in procession); how they multiply and spread (through reproduction); and how they might 'move' those who respond to them.

The core question I am asking here is this: *what makes a statue move?* As we shall see, the story of Our Lady of Ipswich is indeed one of locomotion – not just an animated statue, but a *voyaging* statue – and this is central to the significance of the image now displayed on the wall at Ipswich. Yet part of this story of voyaging is made possible by the creation of copies; the original image being already a representation of Mary, here we are encountering representations of a representation. My argument here will explore the potency of such reproductions; they make it possible to speak of the movement not only of an image but of Our Lady of Ipswich herself, in ways that allow for her actions and intentions to be read into history. Yet the problem of what constitutes a 'faithful' copy is a knotty one; I therefore consider different contemporary images of Our Lady of Ipswich in Anglican and Orthodox settings, illustrating distinct processes of reproduction. In each case, as we shall

see, the copy makes it possible to speak of Our Lady's return, though the logic on which such a claim is grounded differs.

There is a particular dynamic to the movement which I am foregrounding here: the statue is *animated by dissonance*. In answering the question 'what makes a statue move?', then, my argument will be that the history of movement is tied up with a history of conflict over the statue's significance, efficacy, and existence. The act of the destruction of the image as a form of "public execution" (Graves 2008: 41) gave it a new life even in the process of attempting to unmask its lack of vitality and efficacy. As Latour (2001: 16) has argued, the iconoclasts' attempt to obliterate an image creates "a fabulous population of new images, fresh icons, rejuvenated mediators". Yet it is not simply the act of iconoclasm that animates the statue through conflict; rather, such agonistic animation is an ongoing process which involves both those who reject and those are devoted to the image. My argument is that the potency of contemporary images of Our Lady of Ipswich relies on an *active cultivation of dissonance*: the consciousness of religious schism; the disjuncture between Ipswich's historic importance and the perceived failures of 20th century development; the juxtaposition between devotional pilgrimage destination and disenchanted shopping space.

"Idolatry, which is most abominable before God, cannot possibly be escaped and avoided, without the abolishing and destruction of images." This is the argument made in the *Second Book of Homilies*, published in 1571 and authorised to be read out in all English churches. Ipswich is certainly a place where this logic was put into practice. Yet in what sense was this a destructive act, and in what sense is such destruction generative? Standing in a part of town largely planned in the second half of the 20th century, looking up at a replica of a statue, how far-fetched is it to see not only something that resists destruction, but is animated by the dissonance generated around it?

From presence to absence

Of course, to read the story of Our Lady of Ipswich one way, this paper is surely a study of absence; the absence of a shrine and of a statue (except for a replica), and certainly the absence of the volume of pilgrims that once came to Ipswich. In order to give a preliminary sense of this 'lost' history of pilgrimage, I will therefore begin by outlining the history of the shrine² through to its destruction. Yet here, straight away, we see that iconoclastic destruction is never as simple as obliteration, but itself can imbue the image with an agency it seeks to deny.

The origin of the cult of Our Lady of Ipswich is unclear; Blatchly and MacCulloch (2013) suggest a date of around 1325 or 1326, drawing on the evidence of entry of 1327 in the papal register at Avignon allowing the Bishop of Norwich to grant relaxation of penance for those who would contribute to the completion of a chapel at Ypeçug where an image of the Blessed Virgin Mary had been found underground. Yet contrary to this claim of 14th century origins, it would appear that by 1297 the chapel was already deemed important enough to host the high-status marriage of Elizabeth, daughter of King Edward I, to John, Count of Holland (Haslewood 1898: 53), surely suggesting that its repute as a site of devotion to Our Lady of Grace was by this time well established. At any rate, the 1327 entry in the papal register makes reference to several 'great miracles' associated with the image of Our Lady at the shrine (Blatchly and MacCulloch 2013: 9), and as printing became widespread, the fame of the miracles associated with Ipswich spread through cheaply published booklets (Smith 1980: 28).

2 The most detailed histories of Our Lady of Ipswich are Smith (1980) and Blatchly and MacCulloch (2013); Smith's history is better known and more frequently referred to among the present-day devotees who I will discuss later in my ethnography.

By the 16th century the shrine was booming in popularity, with royal visitors, including Catherine of Aragon in 1517 and Henry VIII in 1522, and numerous inns located around the shrine to house the flow of pilgrims. Some of these inns had names alluding to the life of Mary: The Angel, The Salutation (that is, the Angel Gabriel's salutation to Mary: "Hail Mary, full of Grace"³), The Three Kings, and The Assumption (that is, the Assumption of the Virgin Mary into heaven). Of these, The Salutation survives as a pub and retains the name; though present-day devotees of Our Lady of Ipswich were dismissive when I suggested that this might serve as a marker of place memory (Connerton 2009: 4), telling me not only that the building itself had been rebuilt, but also that the name had lost its Marian significance. As evidence of this, I was told that until recently the sign that hung there depicted two "Victorian looking" gentlemen greeting one another, "so there's no sense at all of who's meant to be saluting who".

The shrine seems to have been at the height of its fame when it came under attack in the context of the English Reformation. Protestant Reformers grew more confident in their condemnation of pilgrimage sites: In 1538, four years after Henry VIII was declared 'Supreme Head of the Church of England', formalising the break from Rome, the Bishop of Worcester and enthusiastic iconoclast Hugh Latimer wrote in favour of the burning of statues of Mary, saying that the "old sister of Walsyngham, with her younger sister of Geppeswich, with the other sisters... would make a jolly muster at Smithfield" and "would not be all day burning" (cited in Smith 1980: 20-21).

The treatment of the image of Our Lady of Ipswich tells us something about the paradox inherent in iconoclasm. Stripped of sacred significance and efficacy, the basic materiality of the statue and the shrine was to be laid bare. Precious metals, such as the silver

3 Luke 1:28

shoes on the statue, were surveyed⁴ in order that they could be taken and melted down; the wood of the statue was to be fuel for a fire; and the stonework of the shrine chapel was to be taken and used as building material elsewhere⁵. Yet the importance the iconoclasts attached to the removal and public destruction of such images suggests that they are anything but inert materials, but rather have a potency which requires deliberate and demonstrative action.

The *Second Book of Homilies*, published in 1571 and authorised to be read out in all English churches, contains a sermon on idolatry which helps us to understand the motivations of the Reformers who sought to destroy Our Lady of Ipswich. Why, the sermon asks, would one go on pilgrimage to the site of a particular statue unless it was thought to have a particular power? Such a pilgrimage is superstitious folly, given that such images are “dead stocks and stones” (1571: 225). Yet no sooner has an image been set up in church, people will start to worship it; and this is offensive to God as contravening his commandment, 'Thou shalt not have strange gods before me'. The peril of idolatry can therefore only be avoided through the destruction of these images.

The exposition provided by this sermon is instructive in its logic. On the one hand, the sermon is insistent that images must be understood in terms of the bare materials they are made from; they are mere wood, mere stone and have no significance or efficacy beyond this. On the other hand, it recognises all too well that mere wood or stone can enchant people, wryly pointing out that in this sense praise should be given not to the statues but to the craftsmen who add their labour and prettify the materials. Here they recognise, in a sense, what Gell (1992: 49) describes as the “artist as occult technician”; and that the enchantment

4 Thomas Thacker, an agent of Lord Cromwell, recorded in a letter of 30 July 1538 “There is nothing about hir but... half shoes of silver and... stones of cristall set in silver” (cited in Blatchly and MacCulloch 2013: 54).

5 Blatchly and MacCulloch (2013: 58-61) suggest that some of the stonework was reused in an extension of St Nicholas' church elsewhere in Ipswich.

of such art the viewer seems “obliged to posit a creative agency which transcends his own and, hovering in the background, the power... on whose behalf the artist exercised his technical mastery” (Gell 1992: 52). This risk of enchantment through the apparent experience of transcendence is so great that one simply cannot risk having such images in a church. They must be disposed of.

Keane (2007: 60) sees iconoclasm as a “flamboyant denial” of the efficacy of images which is representative of a broader determination within reformed Christianity to dematerialise religion. “Destruction might be called for because any materialization of the divine at all would undermine the properly spiritual and immaterial understanding of the objects of faith” (2007: 135). In the context of the arrival of Dutch Calvinism among the Sumba, he notes the ways in which Protestants counterposed their Christianity with Sumbanese marapu prayer which involved what was seen as “a fetishistic displacement of agency onto objectified forms” (2007: 184); among contemporary Sumbanese Calvinists, Keane notes that this suspicion of “the fetishising displacement of idol worship” might fall as easily upon the statues of Mary in Catholic churches as upon marapu prayer (2007: 187). Yet attempts to purify religion and abstract it from its material forms often inevitably require material manifestation. Calvinism attempted to “play down the materiality of semiotic form in order to arrive at a disembodied spirit... This goal, however, cannot reproduce itself without generating new semiotic forms. These forms could never be fully confined to their original contexts or definitively subordinated to their 'true', immaterial meanings. They risked being fetishized” (2007: 79). Latour (1998), recognising that even as iconoclasts seek to destroy ‘mere’ materials, that which they seek to obliterate seems to grow in importance at their hands, uses the term ‘iconoclash’ for this kind of uncertainty around what happens when an image is being destroyed: a ‘clash’ because “no one knows whether the idol can be smashed without consequences... or whether they have to be destroyed because they are so

powerful” (2001: 21). What we see here, I argue, is the vital role of dissonance in animating the image: hence the story of Our Lady of Ipswich, as we shall see, does not end on the pyre, but is set into motion by the flames.

In an account of iconoclasm in 16th and 17th century England, Graves (2008) notes that attacks on religious images in England were not acts of random destruction but, rather, targeted at specific parts of the body: the same bodily targets as forms of capital and severe corporal punishment. In this way, that which was being destroyed was treated as though it possessed a human body at the very moment when its lack of vitality was allegedly being unmasked. Latimer's reference to “a jolly muster at Smithfield” which would include the 'sisters' of Our Lady of Walsingham and Our Lady of Ipswich is therefore highly significant. Smithfield was at the time a place of public execution, and especially associated with the punishment of death for heresy. (Indeed, his remark that the statues “would not be all day burning” is a dark joke about the burning to death of Franciscan Friar John Forest at Smithfield, an event at which Latimer preached, and which took a particularly long time.) There is a remarkable personification here, as the need to demonstrate that pilgrims had invested false agency in religious images leads to the investment of agency in the statue through its destruction. It becomes a matter of urgency to remove the image, and to dispose of it in a public and demonstrative way; a statue which the reformers claim lacks efficacy becomes a source of efficacy in a battle for the reform of the church.

As Keane has argued, “the imputation of fetishism is prone to rebound onto the accuser” (2007: 25). This is what I refer to above as the paradox inherent in iconoclasm: the sheer importance vested in the act of stripping an image down to bare materials recognises that materiality is never bare. And, crucially, this act of opposition animates the statue.

Ipswich tomorrow, today

So we have seen that the shrine site was eliminated – or all but eliminated – in the context of one vision of progress; the war against superstition and idolatry which demanded the destruction of the objects of popular religion. Today, the precarious reminders of this site sit awkwardly against the background of subsequent visions of progress, now themselves in the process of ruination. Once again, Our Lady of Ipswich appears in a relation of dissonance.

The town centre of Ipswich was substantially remodelled during the 1960s as part of a plan to provide new amenities for a population that was projected to grow substantially due to planned major residential developments on the outskirts of Ipswich. A document published by the property developers involved in the construction of the new Greyfriars site, with the title *Ipswich Tomorrow* (Bosman 1963), includes a map indicating that the areas earmarked for redevelopment in Ipswich at this time included the Shrine site. The brochure outlines the perceived need for new shops and offices in the town, and above all stresses the need for ample car parking, boasting that a bigger proportion of space has been allowed for this purpose than at any other redevelopment scheme in Britain. “This is undoubtedly the motor age” claim the developers, and as Pinney (2002) has suggested, in the presence of the automonster, worlds are created not through human agency alone but the agency of human/motor hybrids, and with an ergonomic logic that can no longer be understood in the absence of the car. Major new roads were to be built to allow for access to the new developments, with a new ring road encasing (and in some places cutting through) the historic town centre.

By placing photographs of Ipswich as it was then alongside photos of the model of the planned redevelopment, the vision of *Ipswich Tomorrow* very deliberately juxtaposes the “old look” of the narrow streets with the “new look” of the planned shops and office block

(drawing particular attention to the roof-top parking). An elevated view of the historic town centre, with two churches in the background, is captioned “The Ipswich of a bygone age will give way to a lasting tribute to the architectural and building skills of the 1960s”. Connerton, describing “topographies of forgetting” in the modern city, notes “the repeated intentional destruction of the built environment” (2009: 117) as a condition for the loss of place memory: “if our spatial memory is to work effectively a certain measure of stability is required” (2009: 116). The extent to which the intentional destruction and rebuilding of Ipswich substantially altered the character of the town centre is undeniable, yet the claim that this 'progress' leads to forgetting is complicated by a number of factors.

Firstly, what are we to make of the multiplication of signifiers of the past? Many of the developments in Ipswich contain direct references to Ipswich's past; indeed, the name of the Grayfriars site points to its history as the site of a Franciscan friary (prior to the destruction of this friary during the dissolution of religious houses under Henry VIII), as do the names of the office blocks there, “Franciscan House” and “St Clare House”⁶, and the name of the major new road carrying traffic to the development, “Franciscan Way”. Indeed, a ruined archway from the friary is embedded in the wall of the Franciscan House tower block. Elsewhere, building development for council flats in the 1980s led to the excavation and preservation of the remains of the Dominican priory in a public garden at the heart of the residential estate (“Blackfriars Court”), exhuming the pre-reformation past and fixing it in people's topographies of the town. Of course, these might easily be dismissed as whimsical references to the “Ipswich of a bygone age” that was to be overcome; a satire of preservation that references the past only in order to establish distance. Nevertheless, they have the effect of perpetuating topographical references to something that had not existed for centuries.

6 St Clare was a follower of St Francis and the founder of the Second Order of St Francis, most commonly known as the Poor Clares.

Secondly, the undeniable hubris of these redevelopment schemes is worthy of attention. In fact, the plans outlined in the *Ipswich Tomorrow* brochure were a failure from the start. The envisaged major housing development on the outskirts of Ipswich did not materialise, so there was not the population growth to support the new amenities. The supermarket which occupied one of the largest units only remained there a few years, and by the mid-1970s much of the Greyfriars development was empty. In 1984 the shops and central plaza were demolished, leaving only the tower blocks and the car parking. The ring road was never completed. Development elsewhere also stalled, and as a consequence many of the areas that had been earmarked for redevelopment – including the area around the shrine site – bear the marks of urban ruin.

Of course, the short timeframe of this architecture, its near-immediate obsolescence, and its need for re-renewal is, for Connerton, precisely the source of the “diffuse yet all-encompassing and powerful cultural amnesia” (2009: 125) that he suggests characterises modernity. Nevertheless I would argue that in the context of Ipswich the rapidity of the architectural ruination calls into question narratives of progress, and this leaves a gap that might well attract a different kind of narrative; one that draws on sources of memory of what went before. The statue stuck around the back of the shops on Lady Lane, with its juxtaposition of medievalism and 20th century design, can therefore be understood as a counterfactual architecture (Irvine 2013) that calls into question whether the Ipswich built over the shrine was indeed an improved Ipswich. In the same manner as the *Ipswich Tomorrow* document juxtaposed “the old look” with the “new” in order to showcase progress, the statue performs a similar but inverted role, serving as a visible critique of that progress; not least because at the end of Lady Lane is a car park beyond which are blue hoardings surrounding a site that had once been redeveloped and now, following demolition, awaits new development.

This is the context in which pilgrimage within Ipswich should be understood. In the words of one pilgrim to another during a pilgrimage walk through Ipswich on the first Sunday of September (the Sunday nearest to Our Lady's birthday, traditionally celebrated on 8 September), "we're going through the bits that have lasted all these centuries, and the 1960s stuff is being pulled down because it's useless".

Going from place to place

The annual pilgrimage walk through Ipswich⁷ is a focus of devotion to Our Lady of Ipswich, organised by a group now called the Meryemana Foundation and originally named The Guild of Our Lady of Ipswich. This group are most closely associated with the Anglican church of St Mary at the Elms, from which the majority of active members are drawn, and where (as discussed below) a modern-day shrine of Our Lady of Ipswich, initiated and maintained by the group, is now based. St Mary at the Elms is an Anglo-Catholic congregation; that is, while part of the Church of England, they adopt Catholic liturgy (for which a translation of the Roman missal is used) and devotional practices, including Marian devotions. The church is affiliated to Forward in Faith and the Mission Society of Saint Wilfred and Saint Hilda, organisations that declare themselves 'traditionalist' in relation to developments in the contemporary Church of England, and in particular resistant to the ordination of women as Priests and Bishops; the Parochial Church Council have passed a resolution ensuring that the church will remain under the care of a male priest, while recognising that members of the congregation hold different views on the ministry of women and the role of women in church leadership.

⁷ The pilgrimage walk described in this section took place on 7 September 2014.

In its Marian devotion, the Meryemana Foundation reflects the character of the parish church with which it is closely associated; however, it does not describe itself as a specifically Anglican (or Anglo-Catholic) group, but rather as an ecumenical group. In highlighting this independence, it is interesting to note the distinction between the parish church's resistance to female clerical leadership and the prominent leadership role of women in the Foundation; moreover their devotion to Mary emphasises Mary as a powerful figure in her own right, even (in the words of one member to me during the pilgrimage walk) as a "feminist figure", showing the "strength of all women and all mothers, which is something that Christians haven't always been the best at talking about". The lady explaining this to me, a retired professional incomer to Ipswich, was conscious that such a view didn't always sit comfortably with some of the attitudes of traditionalist Anglo-Catholics towards women.

The denominational independence of the group was also important as a way of emphasising that devotion to Mary was something which could unite rather than divide people. This ecumenism was understood to reach even beyond the "family of Christians", and this was reflected in the choice of the name 'Meryemana'. Taken from the House of Virgin Mary near Ephesus, a shrine for both Christians and Muslims, it was explained to me by one of the organisers that this name was chosen to emphasise the thoroughly ecumenical character of Mary, highlighting their call for "Unity through Grace". So, although the majority of active members were Anglican (and all participating in the pilgrimage were Christian) this sense of interfaith openness was emphasised to me repeatedly, especially through an account of the participation in earlier years of a Muslim woman who read passages relating to Mary from the Quran at the shrine.

Announcements of the pilgrimage walk are made in local churches in the weeks leading up to the event, and alongside active members of the Meryemana Foundation and

parishioners of St Mary at the Elms are Anglicans and Catholic priests and congregants from other parishes in Ipswich and the surrounding area; a small number come from further afield, and as will be discussed later in some years there have been international pilgrimages to Ipswich.

The route taken is based on a significant historic precedent: Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, Lord Chancellor to Henry VIII prior to his fall from favour, had ambitious plans to found a college in his native town of Ipswich, and made arrangements for an annual procession to be made from the college to the shrine of Our Lady of Ipswich (Smith 1980: 36-37) on the birthday of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Although in this sense the pilgrimage walk might be thought of as a revival, in fact the procession planned out never took place as intended. The first year, 1528, the procession was disrupted by poor weather (Blatchly and MacCulloch 2013: 43); by the next year Wolsey had fallen out of favour, was stripped of his power, and subsequently accused of treason. His plans for the college therefore never came to fruition, and thus neither did the annual procession. Nevertheless, in following this well documented route, modern pilgrims are able to reconnect with the pre-reformation geography of Ipswich: the town streets serve as a locus of memory (Connerton 2009: 22), possible because in this part of town (unlike others affected by the developments described above) there is a “morphological persistence” in the layout of the roads (2009: 26).

The pilgrimage walk begins at St Peter’s Church, near the quay at Ipswich; this was Wolsey’s planned starting point, as it was to be used as the chapel for his college. No longer a functioning parish church, today it sits against the backdrop of a large dockside redevelopment scheme. The church is now used as a performance and rehearsal space, and also houses the Ipswich Charter Hangings, commissioned to celebrate 800 years since

Ipswich was granted a royal charter; one of the embroidered panels of these hangings depicts Our Lady of Ipswich.

The pilgrims are welcomed to the church by a representative of the Meryemana Foundation, who stresses the ecumenical character of the pilgrimage: “we are a family and families often need reconciliation. Mary is the reconciliator extraordinaire. Pray for all Christians and all in the larger family of humanity”. This is the first of five historically significant locations we are to pass through, saying a decade of the rosary at each, and reflecting upon the joyful mysteries (each mystery being a meditation on a point in Jesus and Mary’s life). At each point in the pilgrimage, a different preacher reflects on one of the mysteries before leading recitation of the prayers of the rosary, followed by the singing of a hymn.

The description of the event as a ‘pilgrimage walk’ (and not, for example, as a pilgrimage procession) is significant. While the group is attentive at the points of prayer on the walk, listening to the preacher, joining in hymns, and bowing their heads while reciting the rosary, between the points of prayer the mood is informal. Participants joke and chat, making general conversation about varied topics including the town around them. The group moves steadily from location to location, but there is no sense on this occasion that the walking itself is ordered or ceremonial, no attempt to deliberately slow the pace or to walk in silence. On some years a banner is carried bearing the image of Our Lady of Ipswich⁸, but without this there are no other external cues, other than a high proportion of clerical collars, that mark the group out as moving specifically as pilgrims. In this regard, the interaction between the ceremonial engagement at the points of prayer and the relaxed chatty town walk between the points of prayer is a “juxtaposition of the numinous and the banal” of the type

⁸ The banner is at all other times kept behind the altar at St Mary at the Elms.

that Cannell (2005: 346) highlights as severely complicating anthropological characterisations of Christianity as focused on the otherworldly. Crucially, this juxtaposition is actively invoked both by the preachers and, conversationally, by the other participants walking between the points.

At the first location of St Peter's Church, the preacher provides a meditation on the first mystery, the Annunciation, makes an immediate link between the transcendent and the everyday of our personal lives; "we often shirk our responsibilities, and we thank God that Mary did not".

This theme was elaborated upon by the preacher at the site for the second decade of the rosary. We meditate on the mystery of the Visitation while standing around a statue of Wolsey. The preacher explains that we are each of us on three pilgrimages: "We are on this pilgrimage now – it's not a big one, but we're going! Going from place to place." The second pilgrimage that we travel is life, from birth to death; and the third "and greatest" pilgrimage starts when Christ comes into our lives. "That pilgrimage continues with God in heaven and lasts forever". The significance of this 'little' pilgrimage is therefore embedded in, and made symbolic of, the idea of pilgrimage as a universal journey of faith. In conversation as we move from the statue to the third site, several of the pilgrims begin talking about John Bunyan's 17th century religious allegory *The Pilgrim's Progress* as an expression of this idea of our lives as a pilgrimage, thus interestingly connecting the route of a pre-reformation Marian pilgrimage site with the devotional writing of a Baptist preacher.

At the third site, St Nicholas' Church (also no longer a functioning parish church, and now a diocesan office and centre for conferences and receptions), in his meditation on the Nativity, the preacher makes a different kind of connection between the pilgrimage we are on now, and the wider phenomenon of pilgrimage in which we are participating. He has just

returned from the major pilgrimage site of Lourdes in France⁹ and is keen to stress what he calls the “universality of pilgrimage”: Lourdes is “not just for France, it is for everybody”. The same is therefore true of Ipswich, regardless of how little known it might be in comparison to Lourdes: it is for everybody. And so, once again connecting the particular and the universal, “We pray for Ipswich and for the world”. Invoking Lourdes in this way is, I would argue, significant. While postindustrial devotion to particular sites associated with Mary has boomed in what Turner and Turner (1978: 203) call a “dramatic resurgence”, they nevertheless agree with Christian (1972) that as this growth of internationally famous sites has taken place, local sites of sacred significance have been “deemphasised”. The preacher here is therefore conscious that he is speaking in a context where local Christians are far more likely to be aware of sites such as Lourdes and Walsingham than they are to know about Ipswich itself as a pilgrimage site. In the local Anglican and Catholic primary schools, for example, very little is taught about Our Lady of Ipswich. One of the Catholic schools in Ipswich showed me the detailed and elaborate work the children do on pilgrimage in each year group of the school as part of their religious studies curriculum, but throughout these lessons the emphasis is on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, Lourdes, and Walsingham, and not on Ipswich itself as a pilgrimage site. So when the preacher refers to Ipswich in relation to Lourdes, he is highlighting its relatively mundane identity, but at the same time elevating Ipswich by giving it too a part in what is a transcendental practice.

The third decade of the rosary was recited at the steps of the town hall, where we meditate on Jesus’ presentation at the temple, which is “for all, for the world”. This location is important, as it once again allows the pilgrims to connect an historically Catholic practice with the Protestant faith. Nine Protestants were martyred for their beliefs in the square in

9 For anthropological accounts of pilgrimage to Lourdes, see Turner and Turner (1978); Eade (1992).

front of the Town Hall between 1515 and 1558, and they too are commemorated in the topography of memory of the pilgrimage walk. As with the references to Bunyan, what is interesting here is that even as the route of the walk actively reminds the pilgrims of the historic religious differences, there is a de-emphasis of difference between Christians and an emphasis placed on “commonness of feeling” (Turner and Turner 1978: 13).

This emphasis on Christianity in common is emphasised by the father of the only family group on the walk who tells me that Christians “of all kinds” are a minority in Ipswich (this point gains agreement from other participants). For this reason, he explained, it’s important to “bring to life” on the streets something “which is always there, but that people might not see”.

While the earlier part of the walk takes us through streets lined with well-preserved Tudor buildings, as we come closer to the site of the shrine of Our Lady of Ipswich, passing through the pedestrianised shopping centre, several of the pilgrims start to pass negative comment on the state of Ipswich today. Chatting as we walk along, on finding that I was not from Ipswich, one of the devotees, who was locally based, expressed surprise that I’d “bothered” to come; “I find that when I say I’m from Ipswich, you get a glazed look and people saying, is that on the way to Norwich?”, while another told me “when I say I’m from Ipswich people apologise, they say oh poor you”. He added that it was the “3rd grottiest town in England”, only to be told off by another pilgrim on the walk: “You should not pronounce as dogmas what are merely opinions”. But the opinion was defended on the grounds that “well, that’s what it says in the book”.¹⁰ My attention is drawn to empty shops where the shop fronts are used to try and promote Ipswich’s reputation as a historic and shopping destination:

10 I have yet to find a book that makes this claim. *Crap Towns: The 50 Worst Places to Live in The UK*, published in 2003, lists Ipswich as number 25 (Jordison and Kieran 2003), though the town does not feature in more recent iterations of that book.

windows are entirely covered with a photograph of an actor in a Tudor costume (apparently depicting Cardinal Wolsey) standing in a clothes shop, accompanied by the caption, “From Cardinals to Cardigans”. Again, the strange juxtaposition between contemporary and pre-reformation Ipswich is apparent.

We reach Lady Lane and stand beneath the statue there. Before leading us in prayer, the preacher meditates not only on the fifth mystery of the finding of Jesus in the Temple but on the Joyful Mysteries as a whole, explaining how they juxtapose the miraculous and the mundane; the miracle of Christ’s immaculate conception and incarnation alongside the more mundane “meeting of two mums” [the visitation] and an “experience of losing a child and then finding him again that we can all relate to” [the finding of Jesus in the temple]. And so, having reached the goal of our pilgrimage, standing before Our Lady of Ipswich, “we pray for the holy bits and the boring bits”.

Given that long-distance movement is key to Turner and Turner in their analysis of pilgrimage as a ‘liminoid’ phenomenon, it may seem somewhat inappropriate to attempt to reflect on their approach in the context of an afternoon rosary walk to a largely forgotten shrine site. However, I would argue there is value of reflecting on such small-scale pilgrimage, precisely because it provides us with a vantage point on pilgrimage as a grounded practice beyond the dramatic centres of mass movement (such as Walsingham and Lourdes), and in particular that it highlights what it might mean to be a pilgrim who is actively remembering a site in a context where it has been largely forgotten. For Turner and Turner pilgrimage can be conceptualised as a movement from the mundane to the transcendent: “release from mundane structure... movement from a mundane center to a sacred periphery which suddenly, transiently, becomes central for the individual” (1978: 34). Yet what was striking as we moved through Ipswich was not a movement away from the mundane, but

rather the constant juxtaposition of the mundane and the sacred. This does not necessarily undermine the Turners' claim that pilgrimage is associated with an experience of *communitas* which "strains toward universalism and openness" (Turner and Turner 1978: 250-251); indeed, the constant emphasis on universals of faith ("unity through grace") and connecting the experience of Ipswich with the experience of the world points towards that openness. Yet at no point did this involve losing sight of the specific local reality of Ipswich's built environment. Returning to Paul Connerton's focus on topography, what we see is the deliberate recall of place memory in the face of the intentional destruction of the built environment. In this regard we might follow Eade and Sallnow (1991) in drawing attention to the role of contestation at the heart of pilgrimage; Our Lady of Ipswich is a site of contested meaning, and what is at stake are claims about the geography of Ipswich. Hence the constant juxtapositions which draw attention towards the "boring" urban space, while claiming that something transcendent and "holy" occurs within those spaces nevertheless.¹¹ These serve as an *agitation of memory*; a challenge to the contemporary shape of the town, which is the physical context of the walk and is actively criticised as people move through, with a different deliberately performed geography derived from a planned route of Thomas Wolsey and culminating at a location bearing the markers of a covered and yet not obliterated place memory of pilgrimage, bringing these geographies into active dissonance.

With this in mind, let us turn to the image (or rather, as we shall see, the images) of Our Lady of Ipswich. What kind of contestation is going on there?

11 In suggesting that contestation might be linked to the possibility of transcendence, I am agreeing with Coleman (2002) that we should not rush to see a simple opposition between the Turners' emphasis on *communitas* and Eade and Sallnow's emphasis on contestation; both perspectives demonstrate the potency of pilgrimage sites as places that are "semantically open" (Coleman 2002: 361).

Sacred copies

Having reached the site of the medieval shrine, the pilgrims move from Lady Lane to the nearby Anglican church of St Mary at the Elms for a final hymn, followed by tea and cake. This final destination describes itself as the 'restored shrine of Our Lady of Grace', and is home to a statue of Our Lady of Ipswich carved in oak and installed in the church in 2002. This 2002 oak statue and the 1990 bronze statue in Lady Lane, in spite of their different materials, are very similar in form, having both been commissioned by the Meryemana Foundation and produced by the same artist, Robert Mellamphy, based on the same model: a statue of Nostra Signora delle Grazie in Nettuno, Italy. For the devotees of Our Lady of Ipswich, this act of copying has great significance.

Although the statue was meant to have been taken by ship from Ipswich to London for burning in 1538, a traditional account emerged that it had not in fact reached the pyre, but instead was 'rescued' by sailors and placed on an on-board altar to bring good blessings to the ship. The crew of the ship, coming into difficulties off the coast of Italy, attributed their deliverance from the great storm to the intercession of Our Lady of Grace, and having found safe harbour, gave the statue in thanksgiving to the church at Nettuno. Since this time, the statue at Nettuno has been known as 'The English Lady'.

Blatchly and MacCulloch (2013) see this account as unlikely; they argue that the symbolic importance of Our Lady of Ipswich to the iconoclasts was so great that they would have been sure to deliver it to the flames and end devotion to it once and for all. By contrast, Smith (1980) goes to great pains to ground the story in historic fact, drawing on documentary evidence in Italy. He cites a manuscript dated 1718 and discovered in 1806 among the papers of Guiseppe del Monte, "a member of an old-established local family"; the document claims

“The Blessed Virgin, loathing to remain in that profane climate¹², deigned to come and live by her Statue in our said land of Nettuno” (cited in Smith 1980: 60).

A ballad written by one devotee for the dedication of the oak copy in 2002, and distributed on prayer-cards in St Mary at the Elms Church, tells the tale this way; the first three verses describe the fame of the statue at Ipswich, and how it was taken to be burnt; the next verses then tell of the “faithful men and brave/ Who stole her as they went to sea”, and how they found themselves in a storm off the Italian coast:

In Mary and her blessed son
Who bade the seas to calm
They placed their trust, and prayer raised up
To save their souls from harm

... kindness given and Grace supplied,
Took Lady from her shrine,
Bore her ashore, and gently gave
The town their precious sign

And so, well nigh five centuries past
Nettuno celebrates
Each year in May Madonna's Grace
And self rededicates.

The English town, long since bereft
By sanctimonious zeal
Now sees the chance to close the wound
And Lady's absence heal.

This return comes through the dedication of an image carved “In English Oak” based on the form of the statue at Nettuno to which the people of Ipswich can address their prayers once more. At the 2002 dedication of this oak sculpture, and on numerous occasions since then, pilgrims have come from Nettuno to Ipswich; indeed, in 2011 Ipswich Town Council unanimously approved a proposal for a 'friendship agreement' between the two towns,

12 While the reference here is to the political climate, as we shall see devotees to the statue do joke about Mary preferring the 'warmer climate' of Italy.

suggesting that musical, commercial, and scientific exchanges might grow in the wake of the link between the two towns established by the voyage of Our Lady of Ipswich.¹³

The statues at Lady Lane and at St Mary at the Elms therefore gain a particular potency through their claim to have a basis in the original; not only because of similarity of form, but because they bear witness to survival. Reformation and iconoclasm were not the end of Our Lady of Ipswich.

The role of the sculptor Robert Mellamphy is here an important one. Mellamphy was born in Cork and settled in Suffolk after having served time in the RAF as an aircraft engineer. In discussing the statues with me, those involved in commissioning them explained that as an Irishman Mellamphy had both the “gift of the gab” and also a “great devotion to Our Lady”, and these two elements of his character were crucial in his carrying out this work. Having travelled to Nettuno to make a meticulous study of the statue, he was able to use his “Irish charm” (or so it was explained) to persuade the church authorities to let him take the statue down from its place on the altar, and to handle it. In doing so, Mellamphy became a “catalyst” for the next stage of Our Lady's remarkable voyage.

Taussig (1993), in an analysis of Frazer (1911) and his theories of sympathetic and contagious magic, makes the observation that contrary to Frazer's dichotomy, the law of imitation, by which the representation acquires the properties of the represented, cannot be easily separated from the law of contagion (or contact), by which things in contact with one another continue to act on one another at a distance. “It becomes impossible to separate image from substance in the power of the final effect” (Taussig 1993: 53); “in many, if not in the overwhelming majority of cases of magical practices in which the Law of Similarity is

13 “Friendship with Nettuno, Italy”, Document presented at a meeting of the town council 20July 2011.

important, it is in fact combined with the Law of Contact” (1993: 55). This raises an interesting question about the relationship between the statue at Nettuno and the statues in Ipswich. The statues in Ipswich contest through their presence and their representation of extant source material the *survival* of Our Lady of Grace in the context of her apparent absence. But by what means do they do this? What is striking here is the importance attached not only to the idea that they are copies of the original, but that in the process of copying, the artist came into contact with the original and therefore served as a catalyst for its return. Earlier, we saw the Protestant claim in the *Second Book of Homilies* that any praise due to statues was due to the craftsmen and artists that decorated the 'rude materials'; alluding to what Gell (1992: 49) terms the “artist as occult technician”. Yet here, as “catalyst” for Our Lady of Ipswich, the artist is cast in a somewhat different role.

In the schema set out by Gell (1998: 29) in his 'art nexus', he sets out four basic terms; Index, Artist, Recipient and Prototype. By a conventional understanding of the production of the copy, the statue in Nettuno serves as a Prototype, upon which the Artist bases a new statue (the Index) for the Recipient (in this case, the Mereymana Foundation who commissioned the sculpture). Yet as Gell argues, each of these (and not just the artist) can be considered agentive (for example, if a material “inherently dictates to artist the form it assumes”, then the index has acted as 'agent', and the artist as 'patient'). Given Taussig's observation that the magic of similarity cannot easily be disentangled from the magic of contact, in the act of copying it seems that the sculptor is not only both 'agent' and 'patient', but indeed that the sculptor can himself become the index upon which the original has made its impression *through contact*; and who in turn passes on this impression. In other words, if the artist is able to act on English Oak to carve Our Lady of Grace, it is only because Our Lady of Grace has already acted on him in much the same way.

As Mitchell (2010) argues with regards to the presence and power of the materialisation of Catholic saints, these are statues which *perform* in ways that are both transcendent and immanent: in this case, contesting the 'amnesia' caused by iconoclasm and by the repeated destruction of urban space, bringing the survival of Our Lady into dissonance with a contemporary Ipswich in which Our Lady is an absence.

The Felixstowe Mother of God

It is worth noting that the voyage of Our Lady of Ipswich is referred to in another context: at St John's Church in Colchester, part of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia, where an icon known as The Felixstowe Mother of God is venerated.¹⁴

Carroll (2015) shows the ways in which contemporary Orthodox Christians in the UK work to establish continuity between themselves and the historic practice of Christianity in the British Isles; yet do so in a context where discontinuity is long established following the Great Schism between Eastern and Western Christianity in the 11th century. This discontinuity was further exacerbated by the destruction of the material culture of early Christianity particularly under Henry VIII. For this reason, the veneration of Saints of the British Isles from before the schism, and pilgrimage to sites associated with those saints, has become an important way of grounding the lives of contemporary Orthodox Christians in Britain with their spiritual heritage, establishing continuity with the past in place of the discontinuity of schism: “an understanding of inherited memory” (Carroll 2015: 188).

This idea was emphasised by the parish priest at St John's. He recalled a conversation he had had with a Catholic who had told him, “all your saints are so foreign!” “I said foreign,

¹⁴ The material in this section comes from a visit to Colchester in December 2015.

what do you mean by foreign, you've got St Dominic, St Francis, Spanish, Italian...”; whereas he saw it as central to his faith seek out pilgrimage sites associated with saints of the locality (and has researched and written extensively about this – see Phillips (1994)), it seemed to him that Catholics had largely neglected those saints. As noted above, Turner and Turner (1978) treat pilgrimage in the Catholic context as a process of long-distance movement, and focus on pilgrims moving to major, internationally renowned sites. Here, in an Orthodox context, what we see argued is the importance of remembering the local and remembering the connection to regional history, in the face of an apparent neglect. Moreover, it is striking to note that, in contrast to the emphasis on the pilgrim’s movement which we saw above, in the Orthodox tradition the term pilgrimage makes no assumption of travel, but rather as Dubisch (1995: 78) explains in her ethnography of pilgrimage at a Greek island shrine, “the devotions in front of the icon constitute the essential core”, and a pilgrim may be one who has simply gone around the corner to a village church. Rather than the Turners’ emphasis on a movement from mundane everyday to transcendent periphery, here the focus is on action in relation to an image. One does not have to travel, finding the possibility of transcendence through acts of devotion in place; in so doing, undermining any notion that the everyday locality *is* in fact a mundane location – rather, it is a place of encounter with the divine.

Prior to settling in the former garrison church at Colchester, the Parish Priest had established a mission in Felixstowe, and giving honour to St Felix, who had been the first to convert this area, encouraged the veneration of icons of saints of the British Isles. This practice continues in Colchester, with a special Chapel of All the Saints of the Isles containing rows of icons of those who brought Christianity to Britain. Amongst these is an icon of the Mother of God commissioned for the church at Felixstowe and painted by the Polish-American iconographer Fr Theodore Jurewicz. The Akathist (or hymn dedicated to a saint) to our Most Holy Lady before Her Icon, The Felixstowe Mother of God, used for the

local commemoration on 8 September (Mary's birthday), explains the dedication clearly: “In times of old Thy sacred image was honoured in Suffolk's holy land, O Most Pure Maiden Mary and mother of our God. Then in times of darkness and impety, Thy holy shrine was taken across the sea. But now as Thou art honoured anew in the town of Thy servant Felix, do Thou intercede for us with Thy Son.”

The icon is therefore an image of Our Lady of Ipswich.¹⁵ She is depicted, in keeping with Orthodox tradition, as a painting and not as a statue. Nevertheless, her appearance is based on the “earliest known description” of that statue; Mary is dressed in a rose coloured robe and a deep blue mantle, with the infant Jesus sat upright on her knee. It is interesting to compare the production of this icon as a 'true' representation with the production of the two statues in present-day Ipswich. Whereas we saw that those statues gained their potency through their contact with, and resemblance to, the statue in Nettuno that was said to have escaped from the flames, the Felixstowe Mother of God gains its status as a true representation from the authority of historical sources. The parish priest told me that he believed that the statue at Nettuno contained within it material from the original statue at Ipswich. Yet “anybody who knows anything about art history” knows that it would have been extensively remodelled many times, to fit the fashions of the time. “So what you have there now is a kind of Baroque statue.” It would therefore be highly unsuitable as a model for the icon. Indeed, looking at pictures of the Robert Mellamphy statue (which the priest described as a “modern” depiction), while he recognised that it provided some form of continuity in the

15 As Carroll (2015: 186) explains, “What is certain in the minds of many Orthodox Britons is that William of Normandy systematically eradicated the Church in Britain... Coming in the wake of the great Schism and the excommunications of 1054, the conquest is understood to have been done under the blessing of an excommunicate bishop and to the detriment of the Orthodox (and hence 'true') Church in Britain”; given that no records of Our Lady of Ipswich occur before this point, this may seem an unusual choice of dedication for the Orthodox claim of continuity with Britain's true Christian past. Nevertheless, especially given the claim that it was found buried, the statue itself may date from this earlier period.

town, he was nevertheless critical of elements that just “wouldn't have been correct” when the statue was first honoured; for example “you can see her head is uncovered which is of course completely wrong”.

The temporal practices inherent in these 'copies' were therefore very different. Whereas the present-day statues in Ipswich make a claim of historic continuity through their connection to the surviving statue in Nettuno, the Felixstowe Mother of God finds continuity through the Orthodox practice of remembrance, or *anamnesis*. In a description of an English orthodox icon painter, Carroll (2015: 197) explains that “Ikons, in Orthodox Christianity, are more than simply art-like objects; they are theological statements... Christabel feels the weight of this, and strives for the most accurate, most true, and highest quality representation to which she is able to achieve”. For this reason she proceeds with great historical care: she studies extant historic icons of the saint to be represented; she studies the life and works of the saint; and she takes care to represent details such as the clothing in ways that would be historically appropriate at the time when the saint lived. As Carroll (2015: 196) argues, through such *anamnesis* “the Orthodox Christian is, through mindfulness, able to participate within events long ago. It is a process of coming-to-know-as-if-I-were-there”. In this process, the statue at Nettuno would be an inadequate model, in spite of it being a material survival, as its contemporary appearance fails to bring one into remembrance of the earliest times during which the image was honoured in Ipswich.

Nevertheless, while the means of making a true copy of the image differ, the sense in which it makes possible the narration of Mary's 'voyage' and return is strikingly similar to the claims of survival in the face of destruction seen in Ipswich. Here, once again, Our Lady of Ipswich is animated by a demonstrative act of remembering brought into contrast with the ‘dark times’ of forgetting. Listening to the Akathist to our Most Holy Lady before Her Icon,

The Felixstowe Mother of God, we hear: “Angels and men alike marvelled at the grace of the Holy Spirit which came forth from Thy shrine to comfort and protect those oppressed in dark and wicked times. Again they marvelled as Thou wast taken across the stormy sea to a safe haven in a faraway land. And now we too marvel, for Thou art come again to our shores to comfort and protect anew in these latter times... Thou hast revealed a wondrous sight, O Most Holy Virgin, for Thou dost return to English shores from across the sea.”

What makes an image move?

Contrary to the desire of iconoclasts to destroy Our Lady of Ipswich, those who honour her today speak of not only her survival, but of her movement. Gell (1998: 62-65) refers to the process by which the *Rokeby Venus*, painted by Valázquez, is redeployed by the act of iconoclasm, in which the slash across the canvas creates a new artwork and becomes a vehicle of a different agency, the agent of a different set of concerns. Gell explains that “Richardson [the slasher of the painting] endowed the *Rokeby Venus* with a life it never possessed before by ‘killing’ it”. We have seen the significance which the iconoclasts attached to the material form of statues at pilgrimage sites; the urgency with which it was believed they must be destroyed, and the demonstrative nature of their destruction, burning them publicly at a place of execution for heretics, might be said (following Keane 2007) to imply a fetishism of its own. And indeed, in taking the statue from Ipswich, the reformers unwittingly give rise to new forms of agency; Mary's voyage to Italy and, ultimately, return to East Anglia.

What I have argued is that the image is animated by the dissonance surrounding it. Firstly, the need to ‘kill’ it demonstrates the potency of the image even in the act of trying to prove its lack of potency. In doing so, it grants the image a life it denies. Secondly, the

possibility of the 'survival' of the statue opens up a new sphere of dissonance where an Ipswich in which Our Lady survives is actively entertained as a counterfactual in the face of an Ipswich which has developed in the absence of Our Lady of Grace, and whose development is found lacking. The statue stuck on a brick wall around the back of a shop juxtaposes the amnesia of the "the repeated intentional destruction of the built environment" (Connerton 2009: 117) with the possibility of remembering. The pilgrimage walk around Ipswich is therefore an *agitation of memory*, a challenge to the contemporary shape of the town through the recreation of an historic route to an (apparently no longer existing) sacred site.

What we see, then, is a *voyaging* image. In the statues at Lady Lane and St Mary at the Elms church in Ipswich, we see the proof of this animation through the narrative of survival and return. This is demonstrated through copies rendered potent by their resemblance to, and physical contact (through the body of the artist) with the statue in Nettuno. Somewhat differently, the Felixstowe Mother of God establishes continuity with early devotion to Our Lady of Ipswich through *anamnesis*, the "process of coming-to-know-as-if-I-were-there" (Carroll 2015: 196). Yet in both forms, the images challenge the 'amnesia' of a town apparently stripped of its sacred materiality with a claim of place-memory: to quote the Akathist to The Felixstowe Mother of God once more, "Nigh on one thousand years have passed and yet the memory of Thee hath not died in the Isles".

In an account of religious sculpture of the dead Christ in Lucban, Phillipines, De La Paz (2012) claims "the presence of the 'dead lord', interred in a home throughout the year, cared for by the townspeople, must be more than just sculpted wood; it is, rather, the embodiment of a town's still contested, albeit unarticulated, history". My argument here has been that these images of Our Lady of Ipswich are striking embodiments of contested history,

made mobile by conflict. This is, of course, a history that is unarticulated by many in the town or in the region more widely, precisely because it is largely unknown. Yet through temporal juxtaposition – the cultivation of dissonance – the devotees call into question visions of progress, proclaiming the survival of that which was meant to have been destroyed while the 'new' itself falls into ruin. In this regard, the images are not simply relics of the past, but the enaction of a counter-factual present. Our Lady of Ipswich survives, even if she did choose (to repeat the joke of one of the devotees at the pilgrimage walk) to go and live in a sunnier climate; and, surviving, she can return.

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